



Thoughts from Chancellor Michelle Rhee on learning, schools and system-wide reforms in DC Public Schools

February 13, 2009

Expanding Excellence: The DCPS Effective Schools Framework

As I visit schools across the city, I enjoy watching our school staff in action. I love to see a strong school leader working with staff, or observe a great teacher who inspires excited questions and the glowing, rapt attention of children. As a mother of two girls, I am impressed by the parents who show up at every forum and meeting to advocate for their children and find out as much as they can about working with schools to support their children.

With so many different styles of school leadership, and so many school communities, my visits tell me much about the ways that a school's climate affects the way students feel about and participate in their education.

In our most effective schools, it is clear that there is a shared vision for what an excellent education looks like and how it occurs. In these schools, principals have galvanized their whole staffs and school communities behind that vision, and there are very clear expectations about the strategies their staffs use together to move toward it.

Across the District, even within our most struggling schools, we have examples of greatness. Our job is to ensure that every student in DCPS attends a great school, and that every school meets high expectations in the multiple factors that affect student achievement. To achieve this goal, we looked at our own examples of quality, along with educational research from school districts across the country to determine what makes a great school.

From this work we created the [DCPS Effective Schools Framework](#), which serves as a foundation for reform efforts at the district level and in our individual schools.

What are the Elements of Effective Schools?

We identified six key elements of an effective school.

Element 1: Teaching and Learning

Teachers work together to plan instruction to that holds students to high standards and expectations for achievement, and gives them the skills to meet those expectations.

Element 2: Leadership

The school leader fully understands his or her role as the leader of instruction for the school. The principal creates a vision aligned to district goals that is individualized to meet the needs of the school community.

Element 3: Job-Embedded Professional Development

High-quality professional development happens at school. It fits with district and local school goals, is driven by data, and meets teachers where they are—individualized to their subject areas and the challenges they face.

Element 4: Resources

Instruction and student achievement drive the way the school allocates its resources. Funding, staff, materials, and time are distributed according to the teaching and learning needs at the school.

Element 5: Safe and Effective Learning Environment

Policies, procedures, and practices support a safe environment that communicates high expectations, mutual respect, and a focus on teaching and learning.

Element 6: Family and Community Engagement

School staff communicate well with families and community members, supporting them to know their important roles in creating effective learners and schools. The school invests families and community members in that work.

The Use of Data is Critical.

The use of data is an essential component of the [DCPS Effective Schools Framework](#), and throughout each of the six elements, we will use it to make decisions and to assess how our students and the school district are performing.

I know the topic of data sometimes is not the most exciting for everyone who goes into education. But maintaining the integrity of our data is critical to meeting our responsibilities to students and their families.

For example, in order to individualize instruction—meeting every student where he or she is—teachers need data to assess students as individuals. In order to

adjust the pace of instruction where necessary, they need accurate data about each class.

For a high school to meet higher expectations for college attendance rates, students need strong skills, but they also need their grades and classes to show up accurately on their transcripts.

To allocate resources in the budgeting process as a district, we do it best when school data is accurate. In order to address problems of truancy, attendance data must be accurate and data systems must have necessary parent contact information. Whether it is about academic proficiency, attendance, or simply parent contact information, the quality of data is so closely linked to student achievement that we have to get it right in order to be effective.

There is no fast fix for this one, but in an effort that is aligned with the Effective Schools Framework, we are directing significant resources to make sure we get it right.

How is DCPS using the Effective Schools Framework?

Creating great schools is hard work, and simply developing a framework is not enough. We are working with principals this year so that they understand the framework, and they have worked hard to implement it in schools.

Our Principals Academy is organized around the six elements of the framework, and every month our principals gather for a full day to focus on one of the elements for their schools. To make the framework concrete for individual schools, these professional development workshops are co-facilitated by educational specialists and DCPS principals.

We have also developed a school evaluation tool, the Quality School Review, which is used to assess all schools in each of the six elements. The Quality School Review provides an in-depth analysis of a school's quality beyond standardized tests scores. It includes school visits, classroom observations, interviews with parents, students and teachers, and a variety of the measures that are not reflected in standardized tests.

What's Next? – More in Teaching and Learning

The next step is to provide more specific guidance on the most important part of a great school – Teaching and Learning. I have heard from many teachers and school leaders that they want to know exactly what good teaching looks like.

To create a clear picture of what we hope to see in all classrooms, we are building a research-based Teaching and Learning Framework that lays out what

a great classroom looks and feels like. Teachers, community members, and school leaders have been instrumental in helping us think about how to plan and deliver excellent classroom instruction. Their input and feedback has been vital in helping us develop a Teaching and Learning Framework that will challenge and support our schools in providing students with exactly what they deserve – a high-quality education.

Teachers and principals are at work tirelessly each day across the District. Whether teaching in classrooms, offering extra help after school, planning lessons, grading assignments, creating classroom environments that inspire and reflect learning, reading the latest research in their fields, or setting up science labs and libraries early in the morning... the activity it takes to run a school well is never ending. The Effective Schools Framework aims to maximize the impact of this work, increase collaboration and support for the people doing it, and make the most of their valuable energy in effective, powerful ways.

For more information

Forums for Parents on the Effective Schools Framework

<http://www.k12.dc.us/chancellor/communiques/chancellorsnotes.htm>

Over the next month we will hold three forums for parents on the Effective Schools Framework for parents. The first one is this Wednesday, February 18th.

Download The Effective Schools Framework [PDF]

<http://www.k12.dc.us/chancellor/academic-forum/documents/DCPS-Effective-Schools-Framework-February-2009.pdf>

To learn more about the upcoming forums and download relevant documents, visit the Chancellor's Forum at http://www.k12.dc.us/chancellor/schedule_forums.htm.

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